

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 08239486 1



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

AND  
Vest AB  
Fits

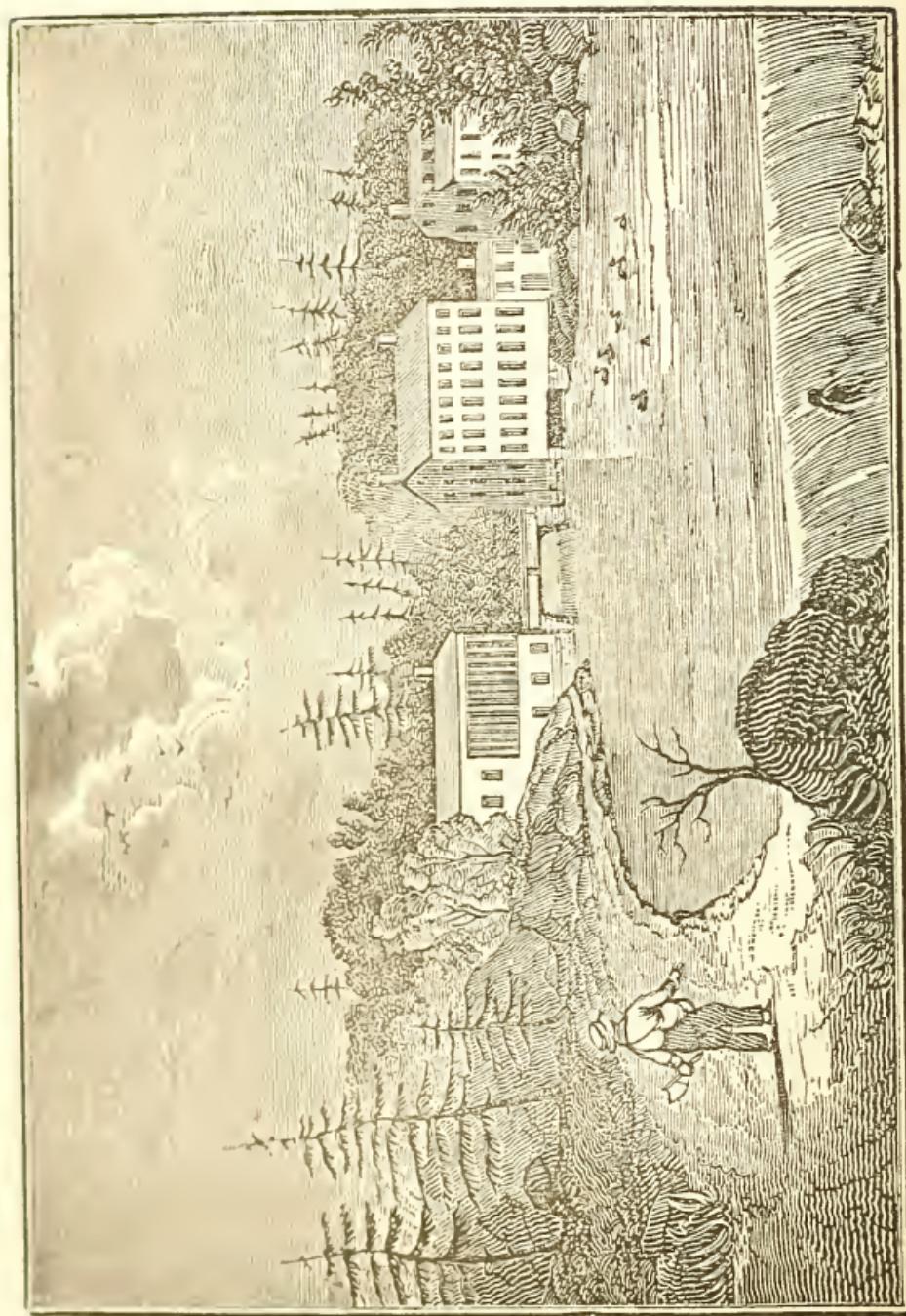


THE CAST-OFF RESTORED.



THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

1000 BROADWAY  
NEW YORK CITY  
P. L.



ABRAHAM VEST,

OR,

THE CAST-OFF RESTORED.

A TRUE NARRATIVE.

"O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true!"

[THIRD EDITION.]

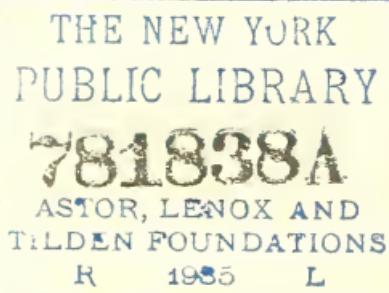
LIBRARY

BOSTON:

JOHN PUTNAM, 81 CORNHILL.

1847.

CB



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1847,  
BY ABRAHAM VEST,  
in the Clerk's office of the District Court of Massachusetts.

RECEIVED  
JULY 1 1847  
VOLUME  
NUMBER

## CONTENTS.

Introduction, . . . . . 13

### CHAPTER I.

Early Recollections, . . . . . 17

### CHAPTER II.

Wanderings with Indians—Escape from them, . . . . . 28

### CHAPTER III.

Circumstances and sufferings at Providence and Smithfield, . . . . . 39

### CHAPTER IV.

Reception at Woonsocket—Homelessness—Engagement in a Factory—Goes off—Occurrences in Mendon, . . . . . 48

### CHAPTER V.

Arrival at New-England Village—Employment—Schooling—Marriage, . . . . . 57

### CHAPTER VI.

Embarrassments—The Revival—Conversion—Baptism, . . . . . 64

## CHAPTER VII.

Interest in his Early History—"Narrative"—	
Correspondence—Discovery, . . . . .	73

## CHAPTER VIII.

Journey to Ontario—Interviews—Occurrences	
of one Day, . . . . .	85

## CHAPTER IX.

Letter—Festivals—Sabbath Meetings—Adieu—	
Departure, . . . . .	103

## CHAPTER X.

Return—"Incident"—Arrival Home—Mother's Letter, . . . . .	114
---	-----

## CHAPTER XI.

Some farther Account of Parents—Painful occurrences disclosed, . . . . .	125
--	-----

## CHAPTER XII.

Mystery Explained—Happy Change—Letter—Conclusion, . . . . .	134
---	-----

## P R E F A C E.

---

The facts contained in this little volume, have been chiefly furnished by Mr. Vest;— the verity of a large portion of them, however, rests not simply on his testimony, but has been corroborated from other sources. They are, what they profess to be, FACTS. Indeed, the subscribers, who have for some time been personally acquainted with the *subject* of them, believe that they have the clearest and most satisfactory evidence of the truth of all that is contained in the following narrative.

It will be perceived, in perusing these pages, that the early childhood of “The Cast-off” boy, is, still, to some extent, shrouded in mystery. How long he remained at Troy, N. Y., after being left there by his mother?—what was the occasion of his leaving that place?—at what time he commenced his wanderings among the Indians?—how long he was with them, and what portion of time he passed in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, before he arrived at the village of his present residence?—these are questions which it must be the *work* of time correctly and fully to unravel, if it ever be done.

In furnishing the materials for this story, much credit is justly due to C. P. Smith, Esq., post-master at Ontario, Wayne Co., N. Y., who has spared no pains to obtain, from the parents and others, such facts as were necessary to the preparation of this work,—and also to C. M. Pratt, Esq., post-master of New Eng-

land Village, Mass., who has cheerfully lent similar aid.

To the editor of the *Christian Watchman*, in particular, for publishing the "*Narrative*," drawn up with a view to elicit information,— and to other editors for copying the same, the subscribers tender their hearty thanks.

The communications of the mother, it is believed, will give much interest to the account —the language and style of which are preserved entire, with only one or two slight verbal alterations.

This volume has been prepared under circumstances somewhat unfavorable, both from the difficulty of determining dates, and also of readily securing the information desired on several points. Many of the materials relating to the early history of the "*The Cast-off*" boy, beyond his own recollections, have been obtained from correspondence.

The subscribers, however, send it forth to the public, with the *hope* that its imperfections and deficiencies will be readily excused.

—with the *belief* that it will furnish important lessons of instruction,—with the *desire* that its sale may be such as to bring pecuniary profit to the *subject* of it, and with their *prayers*, that it may contribute something to the cause of Humanity, Temperance, Virtue, and Religion.

HERVEY FITTS,  
WM. C. RICHARDS.

Sept. 20, 1847.

## INTRODUCTION.

---

It has sometimes been justly observed, that “facts are stranger than fiction.” *Such* facts, it is reasonable to suppose, will be sought and read with interest, in this age when fiction is so eagerly devoured. A fondness for narratives is not surprising; but all true ones are not equally profitable. Even in the choice of such productions there should be careful discrimination and selection. The account given in this volume, has, it is believed, much in it to interest, and in the opinion of many, is adapted to afford useful instruction, and also deeply and profitably to affect the heart.

As readers generally are desirous of knowing all, and not simply a part of a subject, the following history has been written with somewhat of particularity and minuteness, not merely to gratify a reasonable curiosity, but as affording opportunity to improve certain incidents, in a way to awaken in human bosoms a deeper sense of the goodness of God, and of his providential care over us; and also to fix it in the heart, that virtue is lovely and kind, and vice ugly and cruel.

“ A Deity believed, is joy begun ;  
A Deity adored, is joy advanced ;  
A Deity beloved, is joy matured.”

Abraham Vest is no fictitious character—but a person who lives in New England Village, near Worcester, Mass., and is well known in this community. A short time since, he did not know who were his parents, where he was born, or what was his age, or name; singular circumstance, as it

may well be supposed. Indeed, his whole history is remarkable and strange, and it would not be surprising if the reader is already *anxious* to learn every thing in regard to it. Be patient, and read on in a regular course to the end, and your curiosity will be relieved, and your heart be filled, it is hoped, with gratitude to the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

“ Safety and health to God belong,  
He heals the weak, and guards the strong,  
’Tis to *his* care, we owe our breath,  
And all our near escapes from death.”



# ABRAHAM VEST.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY RECOLLECTIONS.

“ The broken ties of happier days,  
How often do they seem  
To come before our mental gaze,  
Like a remembered dream !”

It seems proper that this history should commence with the early recollections of its subject—recollections of interest indeed, but which cannot probably be related in the order in which the remembered events took place. Abraham recollects being employed, to some profit, when he was very young.

His occasional trips after milk will never be forgotten, when, pail in hand, he trudged along the street, noticing with anxious care the treasure within, lest some of it should escape, to the injury of his credit and of his back. The chip-basket was also a household article, which he was sometimes made to see, and to seize, whatever might be his inclination. Probably, however, he was as well pleased with what seemed to him like work, as other children are; but perhaps not so well as they would be, if they better understood that to be usefully employed is one of the greatest sources of enjoyment, and felt the importance of forming in early life industrious habits.

“ Be active, be active,  
And do what you can,  
'Tis industry only  
That maketh the man.”

Abraham was very fond of play, and like other children he had his favorite associates.

Among that number was one to whom he was ardently attached. 'The name of that one, as he thinks, was Elleck Sickle, or a name like it in sound. Probably that child loved Abraham—was kind and obliging to him, and thus drew out Abraham's affections. It is by manifesting love to others, that we obtain their love. Like begets its like in kind—a smile, a smile; and a frown, a frown. "A man that hath friends, must show himself friendly," is a divine declaration.

“A little word in kindness spoken,  
A motion, or a tear,  
Has often healed the heart that's broken,  
And made a friend sincere.”

The days of sport and glee do not always last, and even scenes of joyousness are chequered with other scenes. So the child of this history found it. So has it been with others. Abraham has a remembrance of living in some thickly settled place, (Albany, as he supposed,) and

of frolics and gambols with children there. But more distinctly fixed in his memory, are several painful occurrences. Among these is a fright which he received from some person dressed in disguise, and in a frightful manner, on purpose to terrify him. It was probably done for sport; perhaps it was done to secure obedience. But such things are dangerous, cruel and wicked. Nothing of the kind should ever be practised or countenanced.

On another occasion, Abraham recollects having his cup full of joy dashed over at once, and filled with bitterness—sad reverse, truly; but it is the fashion of this world. The *fairest* days are often followed by the *foulest*.

“ We should suspect some danger nigh,  
Where we possess delight.”

The occurrence alluded to was this. He had just picked up on the sidewalk a beau-

tiful trunk key. Its brightness made his eyes shine. He thought he had obtained a prize, and ran home, (for then he had a home,) much delighted. But he was met with a frown instead of a smile, and with severe reproof, instead of kind words. With a harsh tone he was told that he had been *naughty*, that he had *stolen* it. A whipping was threatened him, and most likely would have been inflicted, had not his innocence been soon discovered by a kind providence. Such a reception by the person to whom he carried the key, was wrong. Its effect was bad. He ought not to have been thus charged, and treated, without proof of his guilt. How often are persons suspected of some ill, when there is no ground for the suspicion ! Beware of “evil surmisings.”

“ Speak kindly to the little child,  
Lest from his heart you drive away  
The light of love, whose visions mild,  
Are like the opening dawn of day.”

Abraham recollects a much sadder change from mirth to sorrow, than the one just mentioned, on account of its severer consequences. It occurred on the eventful day of his first remembered ride. The morning of that day had several incidents in it that afforded him enjoyment. He felt specially interested, when, as it now seems to him, a basket of butternuts was brought into the house where he lived. He noticed, soon after this event, two women talking earnestly together, on the sidewalk, and the one he now thinks of somewhat as of an acquaintance, asked him which of the two he would choose to go with, and live with; and then they talked with him about the good ride he would have, and the gingerbread and sweetmeats he should receive, and the sights he would see. He felt, he says, curiously, while they thus talked. At length, he wanted to go. The idea of a ride, and of cake and sweetmeats, and sights, pleased

him much. With a smiling countenance, he got into some carriage with the strange woman, and rode off. The eatables he received, the objects he saw, and the pleasure of riding, kept him cheerful for a season. But, by-and-by, there came strange sensations over his soul. He felt that something was wrong—that he was in trouble. The carriage stopped, (a stage coach, he supposes,) and they got out. He looked at the woman. Her face was dark and singular. There was nothing attractive to him in her appearance. The ride was now over, and the cake all gone. Thus ended in sadness and gloom, the day that looked to him so bright in its beginning.

“ So pleasures only bloom to die.”

They now travelled on foot for several days, lodged where they could, and begged by the way. This colored woman in her begging attempts would tell most pitiful sto-

ries of her losses and crosses, and disappointments. But as impressed on his memory, the story which she most relied on to move the hearts of the people, and gain presents from them, was one in regard to being burned out, and the dreadful loss she had sustained by fire. And the things which she was most anxious to keep herself supplied with, in some way, were rum and tobacco—true yoke-fellows, but real troublers to Abraham--the one endangering his back, and the other his eyes. It was sorry, debasing business for this vagabond, even to puff the “Indian weed,” and take the “liquid fire”—*business* which no person *who respects himself* will choose to do at the present day. Well, puffing, and drinking, and begging she went, as *one who had no character to lose*.

Probably in consequence of the impositions which this woman and others of the like kind have practised on the public, some

of the poor from misfortune, have failed to receive the sympathy and assistance which they really deserved. It is true, begging ought never to be resorted to, if it can be avoided, and on no account should falsehood be uttered ; still there may be cases where it would be sin in a person not to make known his necessities, and a great sin in others not to relieve them when disclosed. Such, however, were not the necessities of Abraham's travelling companion ; though it was well for him, and sometimes for his special advantage, that she could produce at times a favorable impression by her fire story on those whom she addressed. On one occasion he found himself the happy recipient of a new pair of shoes, which she had thus obtained. That was a sunny spot to him, amidst the scenes of gloom and darkness. Emotions of joy filled his bosom, as they covered his bruised and suffering feet, all new and shining, and as his own.

If every child felt as happy as he did, on the reception of such presents, how would the stream of life sparkle with its ten thousand bubbles of joy !

With this colored woman alone, he wandered, as he supposes, some two or three months. They had travelled together through sunshine and storm many a weary hour. At length, towards the close of a certain day, when the child of this history was much fatigued, she left the road, and directed her course across lots to a red house that stood in the edge of a wood lot. There Abraham met for the first time, an Indian whom she called her husband, a stout, rough looking colored man, of whom he was much afraid. Wretched, indeed, was the condition of this innocent child of probably not more than five or six years of age. He had no kind father or mother near, to love, pity and take care of him ; no brothers and sisters dear, with whom to play, and be happy.

Let children who have pleasant homes, and affectionate parents, and all the comforts of life, think of Abraham Vest in his new and strange dwelling place for a season, with no other hearts to sympathize with him, and hands to relieve his wants, than those of two ignorant, drinking, quarrelsome Indians, who had no special love or interest for the pale-faced boy.

## CHAPTER II.

## WANDERINGS WITH INDIANS—ESCAPE FROM THEM.

“ Dark is the tale, and strangely sad, which here  
Is woven from some memories deeply stored,  
That should not voiceless die.”

In the last chapter, we left Abraham just after we had met an Indian, who went by the name of Purchase, and who travelled with the colored woman as her husband. One trouble, that now commenced, and they came thick and fast, was, the stern command that he should call them *father* and *mother*. This he disliked very much to do. He knew that they were not his parents. Still, if he neglected to obey in this particular, he was sure to be punished, a thing which came to be quite as much disrelished as saying *pa* and *ma* to those for whose kinship he had no liking. These endearing

terms of respect and affection, are sometimes used in addressing those who do not sustain the relation thus indicated. But it is hard for a child to be compelled to address, in this manner, persons of another color, for whom he has an aversion. The Indians, to whom he was now subject, were intemperate, vicious, quarrelsome, and of roaming habits. They strolled about the country. Sometimes they engaged in hunting and fishing—in attempts to obtain their living from the forest or from the brook,

“ Though for great pains,  
They got small gains ;”

yet it served them for amusement, as much as sporting and angling do the more refined and elevated.

In their travels, they frequently employed Abraham to beg for them from house to house. He generally was successful in obtaining something—cold victuals or old

clothes—things to be first sought, though hard cider and strong tobacco were more ardently desired, and were generally procured in some way. *They* chewed tobacco, as well as smoked it, a thing which no brute cares to do, save a kind of goat of no cleanly habits.

“ Now man should use some little sense  
And with this noxious weed dispense.”

If Abraham did not succeed so well in begging as they thought he might, or if he displeased them in any thing, he was about sure to be felled by a blow, or to be severely whipped. They sometimes spent days in pursuit of blood-suckers, to sell to some apothecary for money. They loved money as well as others, and for similar reasons that many love it, because it enabled them to gratify *self* in some of its wicked propensities. It is such a “ love of money ” that is “ the root of all evil.”

In these excursions, Abraham found hard times. For hours, while *they were resting on the shore*, would they keep *him wading in water*, gathering the treasure so precious to them, on account of what they expected to secure with it. But for the same cause, exceedingly undesirable and unlovely to him, as the results experienced were worse after the apothecary had bottled the *caught*, than when they fastened on his flesh, and drew out his blood.

These Indians sometimes made baskets, and sold them as they found opportunity; and had they abided by this business, and been industrious in it, they might have obtained an honest and comfortable living. But like thousands of others, they were fixed in nothing but in their habits of vice. They loved variety, and sought company and change. They mingled in the worst of society. The consequences to Abraham were exceedingly unpleasant and alarming.

In their drunken frolics, his only safety, in order to avoid beating, or death, was, to hide away somewhere, so as not to be found until the evil spirits were dispossessed, which had caused such cutting and mangling of immortal beings. *That* seemed to *his* youthful mind strange business to be desired, which produced such wounds, and bruises, and sufferings. But *they* seemed to like it; at least, seemed disposed to repeat in some hovel or drunkery, scenes that could be scarcely rivalled in Pandemonium itself.

They were occasionally in their travels very unkind to each other, especially when under the influence of strong drink. Sometimes Abraham was compelled to witness with alarm, the Indian cruelly abusing his pretended wife. At other times he would endeavor to excite their fears, by conveying the impression that he was about to kill himself. These Indians often sought enjoyment in vexing and tormenting each other.

Such things appear *wicked* and *ugly* even when seen in *savages*. But it is to be feared that *others* than colored vagrants take pleasure sometimes in producing unhappiness in human bosoms and homes, where they should study to impart the blessings of peace and joy. If there must be contention, let it not be in families, among associates, nor in civilized society. *Civilized!* May heaven stay the strifes of men, and make the dwellings of all, the abodes of love and friendship. Let zealous efforts be made for such a result—to bring on earth the peace, the bliss of heaven,

“A pleasant smile for every face,—  
O, 'tis a blessed thing !  
It will the lines of care erase,  
And spots of beauty bring.”

After a certain season of angry strife between these vagabonds, they separated for a time, as they had previously done. Abr-

ham chose to go with the man. The Indian was fretful and morose; and at length, after they had been in company two or three days, he bent his course towards a dismal swamp, and encouraged the child to penetrate with him far into the thicket. They reached a secluded place. Then came a moment of great peril to the subject of this history. He was told that he was taken there to be killed. The club was actually seized to put him out of the way, as one of whom his pretended father said he was sick, and would be rid of. But the heart of the savage, as he gazed for a moment upon the face of the terrified child, and saw the fast flowing tear and the deep distress, was softened. God held back the murderous arm. The club fell down. The cruel one also wept. Their tears mingled together.

During that season of great alarm and deliverance, Abraham had it deeply impressed on his mind that there was a higher power

present. He never had had such an impression before. He felt, he said, that "something above man was there, and saved him." God witnessed the scene, and rescued him from death, and fixed in the child's heart an idea of his own existence and greatness.

These Indians were not always cross and cruel. They were occasionally very kind and affectionate towards each other, and sometimes manifested in their way considerable interest for the welfare of Abraham. At one time, when they were passing together a guide-board, on which was written Cumberland, the Indian, who seemed just then, to be anxious that the boy might "know something," told him to look up and repeat after himself the letters on the board. This Abraham did, without knowing what or where the letters were, until he could spell Cumberland. A short period afterwards, he was required to spell the word again. But he had forgotten how to do it;

consequently, the Indian whipped him to drive out his dullness, and soon after, succeeded in learning the child to spell it again. After several times of forgetting and trying, whipping and learning to spell it, the word was so effectually beaten into him, as never to be forgotten, though without awakening in his bosom much pride for the acquisition, or causing him to see in it very great advantage. This was all the schooling he received during his wanderings with the colored vagrants. He could spell Cumberland, and that was something.

At length, after having travelled much—after having visited several cities, and spent perhaps four or five years with these vagabonds, and been urged by others repeatedly to leave them, he escaped from their power. His escape was in the City of Providence, and in this way. His keepers got drunk in a den of iniquity, and fought, and excited his fears. He hurried to get out of the

place. The woman menacing him with her fist, bade him stop. He hesitated a little, but as he looked, he saw her strike with a knife at the throat of the man with frightful effect, at which, still more alarmed, he fled and left them forever. He was seen fleeing, by some young men of the baser sort, who knew of the quarrel. They pointed him to a dwelling where they assured him of safety, and of being provided for. He went as directed—met strangers—and sought of them protection and a home.

We have seen that he found trouble and sorrow while with the Indians,—that he suffered much from beatings, hunger and cold, and in various ways. He spent with them at times, chilly, and even freezing nights out of doors. But he has now changed keepers. Will it be for better or worse? Children who have good homes and kind parents, should be thankful and obedient; and should pity the homeless and

orphan, and aid to increase the interest that is beginning to be excited in behalf of the buds of innocence that are putting forth in various places, uncared for, and uncultivated, and exposed to the rough winds of heaven.

“ Oh, scan not too closely the frailties of those,  
Whose bosoms may bleed on a cold winter’s day,  
But give to the friendless, who tells thee his woes,  
And from heart stricken orphans, oh, turn not away.”

## CHAPTER III.

CIRCUMSTANCES AND SUFFERINGS AT PROVIDENCE  
AND SMITHFIELD.

Said one—"Why art thou standing there?

Off to thy home, begone!"

The child replied, "Alas, for me,

Home—I on earth have none."

The house where he now was, is described by Solomon "as the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, where many have been cast down wounded, where strong men have been slain." Prov. 7: 26, 27.

In such a place, no child could be expected to receive much sympathy, attention and benefit, and especially not this ragged, runaway stranger. But he was allowed to stay there, and was effectually concealed from the Indian, who lurked awhile around the house, looking and inquiring for the white child that had gone off.

He was employed in that abode as an errand-boy, and lived greatly neglected and abused. There was one, however, of that company of reckless beings, whose heart was touched with compassion for the child. It was one, perhaps, who had felt more than any other there, the need of kindness and sympathy herself. One of no beautiful snowy white countenance, but of a dark hue, and of worse features, perhaps, but of a better heart than her associates in crime. It is not wise to form an opinion of others from outward appearances. God looketh at the heart, and we may look at the actions which the heart produces, and thus judge of its character. This person of African blood had a heart to pity the peril and sufferings of innocence. She was human, and belonged to an affectionate race—a race whose down-trodden condition demands the efforts and prayers of all the friends of God and humanity.

A certain Sabbath came—a day marked in Abraham's history,

“The Sabbath, sacred day,  
The best of all the seven,”

whose hallowed influences are doing much to renovate and ransom this sinful, polluted world—a day, when from thousands of altars passes heavenward the incense of prayer, which is offered upon the golden altar before the throne, by the Angel of the Covenant. Hearts of devotion draw down upon earth heaven's blessings. Even where the sacredness of the Sabbath is despised, its influence is felt, and good is accomplished. On that Sabbath, some devout worshipper, perhaps, was led by the Spirit, earnestly to pray for just such a friendless, peril-exposed child as Abraham; and a heart hardened with guilt is affected. Abraham's condition and danger are contemplated, and his escape planned.

On that day of God's appointment for rest and devotion, the negro woman took the child's hand in hers, and talked with him most kindly and tenderly. She told him he would be ruined, if he staid in that abode of iniquity; that he should seek some other home; that she would befriend him, and aid him away. But where could he go? He had in company with the vagrants visited several times a family in Smithfield, R. I. He was advised to go *there*. Abraham was much affected. Though a child, the impression again came over his soul, that some other power than human was present, and had concern with this interview. Through the night, angels seemed whispering in his ear, "away!" "away!" and he impatiently waited for the early dawn, the time they had agreed upon to depart. At length it came, and they silently stole off unobserved, and soon were out of the city. They travelled onward, together, until the house

of God in Smithfield appeared in sight, and then she left little Abraham to find the family that lived somewhere in that region, whose name he remembered, and of whom he had talked as being acquainted. When she left him, she gave him the best advice she had. Each heart felt at parting. She had done an act of disinterested kindness—had travelled miles on foot for his special benefit. Perhaps the Father of Mercies afterwards led her in the path of penitence, peace and heaven.

He was now alone—*all alone*. What will he do? He calls at a house—is met with cross looks, and words, and ordered home. Poor child! he had no home. How much he needed a parent's love and care! He slept that night in a barn. The next day he sought again the family to which allusion has been made. And after wandering about for some time, and inquiring, he found the object of his search. But that

family did not want him. He staid there by sufferance. He was made the slave of all. He had beatings often, and nakedness, and cold, and cross words enough. But he suffered most from hunger. They were poor, and chose not to bestow much upon him. He was always, while there, "half-starved," and could with a good relish, eat almost any thing that came in his way, in the shape of food. Many a time he would gladly have done what the prodigal once desired to do, but "no man gave unto him."

Rum ruled in that house, and produced much quarrelling, abuse and wretchedness. It made Abraham miserable, and eventually drove him off. Well may every child,

"——pledge perpetual hate,  
To all that can intoxicate,"

since so much suffering has been experienced in childhood, and so many have been ruined by the poisoned cup.



Abraham left Smithfield in a sorry plight, and directed his course to Woonsocket. On his way, he felt much dejected. Where should he now find a home? Would the widow C—— take him in?—the woman on whom he had called two or three times on errands, while living at S——. Verily, the pleasantness of excursions depend somewhat on circumstances. Could he have been sure of a home, and of kind greetings at W., his heart would have been buoyant, and his steps light and rapid. But *he* never journeyed in *childhood* and *youth*, as *many* youthful readers sometimes do, anticipating smiling countenances, and good times in visiting *friends*—or in going home. Be thankful for blessings enjoyed, and in prospect.

“ What do we reck on a dreary way,  
Though lonely and benighted,  
If we know of lips to chide our delay,  
And eyes that will beam love-lighted ?

What is the worth of the diamond's ray,  
To the glance that flashes pleasure,  
When the words that welcome us, betray,  
We form in hearts a treasure ?  
Oh, joyfully dear is our homeward track,  
If we are but sure of a welcome back ! ”

## CHAPTER IV.

RECEPTION AT WOONSOCKET — HOMELESSNESS — ENGAGEMENT IN A FACTORY — GOES OFF — OCCURRENCES IN MENDON.

“ A meagre form arrayed in rags,  
Before the threshold stood ;  
A half-starved child had wandered there  
To beg a little food.”

Abraham reached Woonsocket towards night, hungry, and with tattered garments, and soon after entered the dwelling of the only one with whom he had become acquainted. The widow C—— did not frown upon him. She gave him something to eat, and allowed him to remain for a short season. But she had nothing for him to do, and felt too needy herself to bear the burden of his support. In Woonsocket he lived several months without any home. He found associates and friends among the fac-

tory and street children. He sometimes obtained a night's lodging among some of his associates; at other times he would find his sleeping place in some barn, or shed, or loft, or where he could. The day-time he spent in play, or as he chose. He obtained his living through the children, with whom he became acquainted, who would at times ask Abraham if he were not hungry; and would, if requested, generally bring him some good things to eat in the street, or lane, or bye-place. They would sometimes beg him a seat at the table with them, and then his heart would leap with joy at the prospect of having a full meal at once. Smiles he frequently received,

“ His sorrowing breast to cheer.”

Some of his associates pitied him much, and were very kind to him, and wanted he should be comfortably clothed as well as fed. They helped him also in this particu-

lar. But his dress was odd enough, being any fit, and no fit, and ill-assorted. Still it was better than no dress.

Truly, Abraham at Woonsocket was for a while a boy at leisure, and like gentlemen at leisure of modern times, found his situation not always a comfortable one. This was specially true when at a certain time he needed the attention of a physician. His situation, however, becoming known, such attention was procured for him by some kind hearted mother. The prescriptions being followed, resulted favorably. And soon after, with body and clothing thoroughly cleansed, he went forth into the street again, much improved in several respects. But he was now sick of street life, and of homeless independence. He therefore concluded to give up such a life for one of labor and respectability, as he had been advised to do ; and for this purpose he went to a factory establishment in W., and in-

quired for the agent, who soon appeared, and after some conversation took him in, and set him to tending breakers. He now ceased to be the useless idler, and became an active laborer, much to his own advantage. His dress in his new situation was blue cotton pants, thin dark spencer, and a head covering made out of an old hat. He spent here about two months, usefully employed, and would probably have received good compensation and fared well, had he stayed. But he grew tired of factory life, and ran off. Nor is it to be much wondered at, that a child of his years and habits should dislike the close confinement and constant attention that labor-saving machinery requires. Other children have disliked it, and have even acted more unwisely than Abraham did, when he ran away from good keeping and reputable work.

With nothing in his hand, and not much on his back, he hurried on towards Men-

don, passed through the centre of the town, stopped at a house and inquired for Albany, where he intended to go when he left Woonsocket. The lady of the house received him kindly, questioned him closely, gave him something to eat, and advised him to retrace his steps a mile or so to the tavern which he had passed, kept by Mr. G., and there engage himself as a chore boy. He did as he was advised, though somewhat disinclined. At the tavern, he told the keeper that he came as desired by a neighbor of his, some distance back. Mr. G. was reluctant to receive him until that woman, with great kindness, made her appearance and opened the way for Abraham to obtain a comfortable home.

“ There is a golden chord  
Fixed in the heart of every human soul,  
Which oft when by the breath of kindness swept,  
Wakes angel melodies.”

He tarried in Mendon nearly a year. And for the first time in his recollection he here entered the house of worship. Curious feelings came over him as he took his seat in the family pew, looked to the man in the pulpit, and heard the singing, the prayers and preaching. Every thing was strange. He felt odd. All eyes seemed turned toward him. In Mendon he frequently attended religious worship, and better influences were exerted upon him than formerly.

But here the stream of his life was sometimes ruffled. He was living at a rum tavern, a place where many a child had been educated and prepared for a drunkard's grave. And one occurrence connected with rum seemed peculiarly unhappy for him. The stable keeper desired a jug full of the contents of a certain barrel. He made a confidant of Abraham, through whom he sought to obtain the object of his wishes. Abraham was informed of a contemplated

fishing excursion, and was assured that fire inside would be necessary to keep off the cold outside. He was instructed how to proceed to secure it, and promised, as a reward, that he should be one of the party, and enjoy his share of the good time they would have in catching fish together. Well pleased with the idea, he filled the jug and hid it in the wood pile, according to instructions—to be taken with them on their evening excursion. But somehow, like all the sinful doings of secrecy and darkness, it would not stay hid. Most unfortunately for their enjoyment, Mr. G., it would seem, must go to the woodpile, to the very place where the precious treasure was so nicely concealed; and there in gathering up a handful of wood, he came right upon it. He was amazed at the sight. He stood a moment, poked it over, pulled it up, uncorked it, smelt of it, tasted it, and sure enough it was fresh and good, in fine order for use. But how came it

there? Abraham was sought, and the inquiry made, "Who put this jug in the wood pile?" "Abraham, don't lie—tell what you know about it." It was now all out. Just as all wickedness will come out; "for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known." There was no more dreaming that day about a merry time catching fish at night. Abraham owned all—told everything he knew in regard to it. In this respect he did right—it was noble in him to do it—for it he deserved to be commended. We all know what has been true of one boy who could not tell a lie. God honored him. That act has been much applauded, and his name immortalized by his deeds of virtue and patriotism.

Abraham, from the moment of this discovery of wrong doing, became a suspected child, and found his home in Mendon less comfortable, and in consequence, left there

after a little while for another dwelling place. The instigator of the crime abused him much for his honesty, though he knew better than to advise to wrong conduct, and ought to have borne the chief blame of the affair himself. Abraham stayed in Mendon a year, as it is supposed, when he prevailed on Mr. C., a stage driver, to take him, with the consent of Mr. G. to New England Village, in Grafton, Mass., where he had been encouraged to hope that he might obtain work in a linen factory. This was his second ride in a stage coach. His first ride was evidently from some place where he should have found a home and kind care and instruction. His second ride was to the place of his present residence. Surely,

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.”

## CHAPTER V.

ARRIVAL AT NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE—EMPLOYMENT—  
SCHOOLING—MARRIAGE.

“ Rouse thee, child of sorrow,  
Lay thy sadness by ;  
Look ! a brighter morrow  
Dawneth in the sky.”

On Abraham’s arrival at New England Village, he found himself again among strangers. He tarried awhile at the tavern where the stage left him. He appeared timid and bashful. On one occasion the little sons of Mrs. V——s met him, and soon after ran home and told their mother that a “beggar boy” had come to town, and desired that he might have a place at the table with them for one meal at least. Their kind intentions were encouraged. After much persuading they got him in, and grat-

ified the benevolence of their hearts. Here was an exhibition of a lovely spirit. Such a spirit of kindness towards the poor, will not go unrewarded.

“ Give and do good—be kind to all—  
The humble and the poor ;  
True blessings on your head shall fall,  
Which kindness can secure.”

After a short season he obtained employment in the linen factory to which allusion has been made, and was taken to a boarding house. But the tenant was under the necessity of going out and persuading, and conducting him to a place at the table in his new home. Up to this time he had not attended school a single day, though he had reached his teens, a period when many a child is considerably advanced in his schooling. During his employment in the factory, he was permitted to go to an evening school for a short season. But to a child almost

entirely unlearned, like him, (though he could still spell "Cumberland,") and tired out with the day's occupation, such an opportunity could not be expected to be of much advantage.

At the end of about two years, the business at the linen factory stopped, and he was again afloat on

"Life's troublous ocean."

He was, however, kindly permitted to have a home where he had boarded. He now learned the shoemaker's trade, and managed to support himself comfortably. Not far from this time, he made another attempt to be profited by attending school. It was the winter's school of the district. Our common schools are of great advantage to the rising generation. Here oftentimes the foundation is laid for future usefulness and eminence. The promising indications sometimes exhibited by learners in the district school, have

been improved upon with the happiest results. Like all other temporal blessings, however, those of the common school may be perverted or lost. It was unfortunate for Abraham, that the pupils, soon after the school commenced, manifested a spirit of mischief and rebellion, and so far did they succeed in their course of disobedience and wickedness that the master left, and the winter's opportunity for learning was nearly lost to the children of the district. Such occurrences are very lamentable—are of no credit or advantage to any one, but are seriously injurious to all concerned. The unruly scholar gives intimation that he has not been well managed at home—that his lawful controllers have not controlled him—have not judiciously followed the advice of Solomon, who wrote for our profit as taught of God. Prov. 13: 24, 19: 18, 22: 15.

“ Solomon speaks—his words are mild,  
Spare the rod and spoil the child.”

They have spared the rod, perhaps, when its use may have been required to secure obedience, and the best good of those entrusted to their care. No district should, for its own credit and benefit, allow the scholars to drive off the teacher. "Order is heaven's first law," and every school master should know it, and should be made to feel that he must maintain order, and will be sustained in doing it. Abraham made other laudable attempts to be profited by attending school, and has picked up some learning. But the disadvantages which he experienced from early neglect in regard to education, contrast strikingly with the great advantages which thousands enjoy, and which they should well improve, and for which they should be very thankful to the great Teacher and Benefactor.

Abraham, though for years constantly exposed to the worst of influences, contracted few, if any, of the many vicious habits

by which he was surrounded. He was looked upon as a kind-hearted, good boy, and was sometimes called "Abraham the best," or "the best boy." Hence his name came to be written sometimes Abraham Best, on the debtor and credit records. That did not strike him as exactly right. But he must have some surname, and as the change of sound from Best to Vest was slight, he began to call himself, when asked his name, Abraham Vest, and this soon became the name by which he was known.

The good boy still felt disposed to keep on doing well, and so took him a wife, some ten years ago, a *Lamb* nourished near by,

"And like a lamb from fountain clear,  
She to his fold confiding turned,  
And round his sweet domestic bower  
The wreaths of changeless love entwined."

He was happy in his choice, and secured in the event, some dear interested relatives, and an abiding home. He commenced house-

keeping in Boylston, a town that now appears to him as having something of romance belonging to it, on account of a recent discovery connected with his history.

Mr. Vest and his companion have been blessed with two interesting children, a son and a daughter, and with industry and economy, have managed to live comfortably and respectably.

It is now about twenty years since he first made his appearance in New England Village. He was then homeless, friendless, the "beggar boy," half clothed. Now he is the head of a family, has a home and kind friends, and above all, has a name and a place in the church of God, and has the prospect of ultimately entering upon an inheritance incorruptible, and of receiving an immortal crown;

" That prize with peerless glories bright,  
Which shall new lustre boast,  
When victor's wreaths and monarch's gems  
Shall blend in common dust."

## CHAPTER VI.

EMBARRASSMENTS—THE REVIVAL—CONVERSION—  
BAPTISM.

“ Faith, kindly bridging the river of life,  
Points to the treasures which heaven reveals ;  
Hence, though the waters below are in strife,  
Peace like a river the lowly one feels.”

At the close of the last chapter the fact is mentioned that Mr. Vest had become interested in that covenant which is well ordered in all things and sure ; and had prospects of the most cheering kind. Indeed, he appears thus far to have been remarkably the child of Providence. God had watched over him, had kept him alive, and had at several times impressed on his mind ideas of the Divine presence, power and kindness. He led him in a way that he knew not, and brought him at length to rejoice in the hope

of heaven. The religious history of a man is the most important part of his history. This indicates his usefulness and happiness on earth, and his portion in eternity.

“ Religion is the chief concern  
Of mortals here below.”

Mr. Vest was fortunate in forming a special acquaintance in a family where piety had a place in the bosom of at least, one of its inmates. Mrs. Lamb, the mother of his wife, used occasionally to address him on the subject of religion. These hints and remarks had an effect, and produced serious impressions. In the night watches, sometimes, thoughts of sin, of God, and eternity, would steal upon his mind and disturb his sleep. He wished he were a Christian pilgrim, but could not see the way, nor find it in his heart, to “strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

When the revival of religion commenced in New England Village, in 1842, during which about 140 united with the Baptist church there, Mr. Vest was living some distance from that place, but he felt its influence, and was drawn to the meeting in the village. On one Sabbath he was present when some thirty persons made a public profession of religion. It was a Sabbath of rare interest with the people. His heart was tenderly and powerfully touched, as he gazed upon the scene of solemn covenant with God, of strong faith in the resurrection, and of holy separation from the world. Tears streamed down his cheeks, and firm resolves were made. The Sabbath services closed; all having been deeply interesting, and having produced powerful impressions on his mind. He returned home anxious to obtain a preparation for heaven.

About this time, he experienced trying

embarrassments in his pecuniary affairs, in consequence of the numerous failures that had lately occurred in different parts of the country. His resources were now all gone, and he had not much capital in the way of credit, not enough to pass current for a few pounds of flour. He left *that* store with a sad heart. He was now several miles from New England Village. There he might be more successful in obtaining what he needed, and there too, many had recently secured a treasure in heaven. He thought of that treasure, of its immense value. Could *he* not obtain it? He had heard that it was not necessary to buy it—that it was bestowed without money and without price. With such meditations he hastened to the village, weeping as he went, thinking at times of his friendless condition and unpleasant circumstances, having no parents or relatives that he knew of, only those by marriage,

and apparently cut off, or nearly so, from the sympathies of man.

“ When nought but gloom and doubt we see,  
How fitting then ——————  
To turn our ardent gaze on high.”

Under such circumstances, how forcibly the inquiry came over his mind, Can I not have God for my Father, and have friends and treasures in heaven? But who cared for his soul? He had sometime previously put himself in the way of a minister of the Gospel for the purpose of being conversed with on the subject of religion; but nothing was then said to him on that subject. A knowledge of such facts should excite all Zion’s watchmen to “ be instant” when apparently it is “ out of season,” as appearance and fact may be opposite.

He entered the house of God. It was full of attentive worshippers. All seemed engaged and deeply interested. It was a conference

meeting—many exhortations and prayers were offered. At length a moment's pause came. As if under a divine impulse, Mr. Vest was at once on his feet. He seemed much affected—all eyes were turned upon him as a stranger to most of the people of God then assembled. He said that he had been a wanderer in the world, his condition during the earliest years of his life had been friendless and homeless, that he had not the slightest recollection of his parents, or where he was born, or of his true name and age, or whether he had a relative on earth, (save those by marriage,) and that he had come several miles to seek the salvation of his soul, and desired that prayers might be offered in his behalf. His appearance and remarks excited much interest, and called forth earnest supplications that the Lord would make him a trophy of his victorious grace. At the close of the meeting, warm hearts surrounded him, and he found such

sympathy awakened for him as he had never witnessed before. Homes he now had in abundance. He remained with his new friends a short season, during which time he was led to rejoice in that God who is rich in mercy.

“ Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face.”

Mr. Vest, with money in his purse, with his hands full of good things for his family, and his heart full of love to God, returned home, and met his companion as he never had met her before. A most cheering interview followed. The little ones even were merry—all were joyous. Soon he was again on his way to the village, praying as he went that the sharer of his temporal sorrows and joys, at this time accompanying him, might become the partaker of such happiness as he now experienced, and that God who is good to all, soon gave him the

desire of his heart, and they were doubly blessed. Yea, her father and other members of his family became also interested in the Saviour's love. This was a new era to these kindred. Angels rejoiced over the change as they were united to Christ in bonds of everlasting love, and received the promise of God that all things should work together for their good, and became the expectants of an everlasting kingdom and crown of glory.

“ Not one from Heaven's love too much can hope,  
If what he hopes he labors to secure.”

A few weeks subsequent to the reception of these great blessings, Mr. Vest and his wife united with the Baptist church in New England Village, in connection with several others. The scene was one upon which the heavenly host might have gazed with joyous emotions, as exhibiting the power and love of Christ, and one upon which

men looked with tearful eyes, subdued feelings and rejoicing hearts.

“ Jesus thou friend divine,  
Our Saviour and our King,  
Thy hand from every snare and foe  
Shall great deliverance bring.  
Sure as thy truth shall last  
To Zion shall be given  
The brightest glories earth can yield,  
And brighter bliss of heaven.”

## CHAPTER VII.

INTEREST IN HIS EARLY HISTORY—NARRATIVE—CORRESPONDENCE—DISCOVERY.

“ Night is passing over,  
Vanishing away ;  
Rouse thee to discover  
Signs of coming day.”

We have now reached a point in Mr. Vest’s history which seems to be near its end. Indeed, the preceding account was all the history of his life, or nearly all of interest that was known till recently, by him or any other person with whom he was acquainted. He had never experienced, within his remembrance, the feelings of a child towards a parent, or of a brother towards a brother or sister. Years had been spent in ignorance that he had a single relative on earth.

There was a mystery hanging over his early childhood which was painful to contemplate, and which could not in the least be penetrated. Sometimes it was a subject of conversation among his acquaintances. Occasionally, considerable excitement was produced in regard to it. This was specially true at one time, when an advertisement appeared in some paper for a lost boy, in which it was stated that could that child be found, it would be much to his advantage. From some statements in that advertisement, it was supposed that Abraham might be the lost child. It was said repeatedly that something ought to be done to obtain a knowledge of his kindred. But nothing was done. A while afterwards an interest was again excited to find out something relative to his early childhood. An attempt was made to do it. A sketch of incidents and facts connected with Abraham's history and person was written, and information

solicited. That sketch was sent to an editor of a paper in Worcester, but it never made its appearance.

At length, a minister of the Gospel, being detained a few days by the Providence of God in New England Village, learned with much interest some of the singular events in Mr. Vest's life, and said, as others had often remarked before, that an account of such incidents should be made public, that it would be interesting, and might bring to light something of importance. A few months subsequent, several facts in his life were obtained and published, in a narrative form, in the *Christian Watchman* of February 12, 1847, under the head of "The cast-off, or stolen boy."

The editor prefaced the account as follows :

"The following strange and deeply affecting narrative was drawn up by a gentleman who is well acquainted with the facts,

and has had many private conversations with the individual whose singular history cannot fail to excite the interest of every one. It is hoped that the publication of this story will lead to some clue by which the mystery which hangs around his origin may be dispelled. The account may be relied on as strictly true."

Besides several of the things stated in this history, the "Narrative" published in the Christian Watchman contains the following extract:

"If Abraham has a mother living, or any friends who took care of him in early childhood, they could easily satisfy themselves that he was the child they dressed and nourished once, as he has a mark on his back of a milk white color, which must have been there at a very early period of his infancy, if not (as is most probable) always; and must have been noticed by persons who had the care of him in the days of his helplessness."

ness. He has also a large scar on his left foot, probably produced by a scald or burn, of the cause of which he has not the slightest recollection. Yes, he could be identified by any individuals who knew him in his earliest years, and who should care to find him. Cut off as he now is from all knowledge of his parents or kinsfolk, it would afford him gratification, if not advantage, could some of them be brought to light."

The narrative was extensively copied, and as a result, the Postmaster in New England Village received the following letter, dated

*Post Office, Ontario, Wayne Co., N. Y.*

*April 12, 1847.*

ESQUIRE PRATT,

Dear Sir,

A narrative of the "Cast-off, or stolen boy," copied into the "Morning Star" from the Watchman published at Boston, reached this place and was read by a Mr. and Mrs.

Wilson in this vicinity, who believe that the person mentioned is no other than their son. At the request of Mrs. Wilson, I address you this line to learn if what is stated in that account can be relied upon. If the child referred to is the son of Mrs. Wilson, his true name is John Negus Wilson, called in part after his mother's maiden name, which was Lydia Negus, and was born in Dummerston, Vt., in 1813. When the boy was about three and a half years old, the mother took him and the daughter, named Catharine, and went to visit a sister of hers at Troy, N. Y., by the name of Winchester. After staying there about four or five months, she returned to Vermont, taking the girl with her, but leaving the boy behind, in the care of her sister, at Troy; and she says she has not for years heard from him. The child referred to in the "Narrative," as the early playmate of whom Mr. Vest now thinks he has some recollection, by the

name of Elleck Sickle, Mrs. W. thinks must have been one of his early playmates in Troy, by the name of Electa Ingles. The marks pointed out in the "Narrative" upon Mr. Vest's person, are the same Mrs. W. says her lost son had. Mrs. Wilson is persuaded that if she could see Mr. Vest, she could make known to him certain things to satisfy him that he is her son. Please reply to this line as early as possible, as there is some interest and excitement felt here.

Yours, in the cause of humanity,

C. P. SMITH, P. M.

*C. M. Pratt, Esq.*

When the foregoing letter was received at N. E. Village, Mr Vest was away on business, and was not expected to return for several days. But God minds the affairs of men, and directs the paths of those who acknowledge him in all their ways. While Mrs. Vest was at the house of her pastor,

and was deliberating with him upon what was best to be done relative to the communication received from Ontario, and just as some one present was saying, "how much his opinion is needed who is most concerned! and I do not see how the letter can be answered without consulting him,"—Mr. Vest entered the house, and asked what had taken place during his absence? and remarked, that he had been so strongly impressed that something had, and that he was needed at home, that he had felt constrained to return much sooner than he had intended.

The conclusion of the deliberation then held, was, that an answer should be returned immediately to the above communication, an extract from which is here introduced, dated,

*Post Office, N. E. Village, Mass.,*  
*April 29th, 1847.*

C. P. SMITH, Esq.

Dear Sir,

\* \* \* \* \* You will, therefore, so far as it is in your power, answer the following inquiries.

1. What is the complexion of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson? Light, dark or sandy? Children, you know, generally resemble their parents.

2. What was the form of the white spot on the child's back, called John N. Wilson; and where was it? High, low, or on the side?

3. On what part of the foot was the scar?

State whatever else you may deem necessary—I write at the request of Mr. Vest. Please reply soon, and all inquiries you may

hereafter propose, shall receive prompt attention. Your most obedient,

C. M. PRATT, P. M.

A full and satisfactory answer to the letter containing the above extract, was received, dated, "Post Office, Ontario, N. Y., May 1st, 1847,"—in which, among other facts that have their appropriate places in this work, it was stated that "Mr. Wilson is of light complexion, \* bordering on the sandy, and that the lost son in many respects resembled him, when a child, and that the spots referred to are on the left side, near the back, and that the scar is on the left foot at the root of the toes, caused by hot ashes." In concluding this letter, Mr. Smith remarked, "The material facts in the case have often been told

---

\* Mr. Vest is of the same complexion.

by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson for many years, and always been believed. Should Mr. Vest be satisfied that these people are his parents, it would afford them much happiness to see him. If he has still doubts, perhaps a visit out here might remove those doubts, as it is the opinion of friends, that there are facts and explanations which they intend to give to no one else. If Mr. Vest will come to this place, he will take the canal to Palmyra, twelve miles south of here. Come on to my house, and every facility will be afforded him by myself and neighbors, to ascertain all the facts in the case, if any thing more is necessary."

There is something in the spirit of pains-taking, to promote human enjoyment, like what is manifested in the foregoing epistle, and others from the same hand, which we all admire. Verily, to be humane and kind, brings happiness to our own bosoms, as well

as gains the affections of man, and the approval of heaven.

“Who blesses others in his kindly deeds,  
Will find the healing which his spirit needs ;  
For every flower, in others’ pathway strown,  
Will shed its fragrant beauty on our own.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

JOURNEY TO ONTARIO—INTERVIEWS—OCCURRENCES  
OF ONE DAY.

“——— hapless child restored,  
Smiles at his parents’ hearth and social board,  
When from the heart the tears of rapture flow,  
And virtue triumphs o’er remembered wo.”

The evidence furnished by the above correspondence was such as to leave little doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were the parents of the lost child. It appeared from the last letter, from which extracts have been given, that Mrs. W. was able to put her finger upon the very marks Mr. Vest bears upon his person, to tell their forms, locations, and probable causes. It was therefore thought best by himself and others, in order to the full satisfaction of all interested, that he should comply with the generous request presented

him in the communication of Mr. Smith. Accordingly with many fears, much trembling, and some reluctance, he started for Ontario on the morning of the 19th of May, 1847. Passing through Albany and Syracuse, he arrived at Palmyra on Friday morning, about 4 o'clock, A. M.

He was now within about twelve miles of the place of his contemplated destination. Finding no public conveyance ready to take him there, he walked the distance. *Such* a walk he had never taken before. He was on his way to visit his supposed parents, of whom he had not the slightest recollection. He was going home, perhaps, and yet of that home he had been but recently informed. Thoughts, pleasant and painful, crowded upon him as he travelled on. "What if they should not be my parents," was an idea that would sometimes start up in his mind, in a very unpleasant way; and then again the thought would occur, "what if it

should be clearly evident, that I am their son? How will they appear to me, and how will things look about the homestead!" Thus meditating, and anxious and weary, he entered the village of Ontario, Friday, about half past 11 o'clock, A. M. The village had a strange interest to him. There lived his parents, probably. But in what house do they reside? And where lives Mr. Smith? After an inquiry at a shoemaker's shop, and another at a store, the Post Office was found.

Mr. Smith had just come in from the field, and was in an easy attitude, reading a newspaper, when Mr. Vest entered his dwelling. Mr. V. endeavored at first to appear indifferent, but soon asked if Mr. Smith was at home. "I am the man," was the answer, and a careless glance was cast towards the stranger. "You have been writing to New England Village, a place in Grafton, Mass., have you?" "Yes," was the reply, and

he read on. "You have had something of a correspondence with Esquire Pratt, of that place, have you?" "Yes," was the answer again, and a somewhat searching look, was now given to the inquirer. Mr. Vest then made himself known as "the cast-off, or stolen boy." At that announcement, the paper was at once thrown aside, and Mr. Smith, springing upon his feet, seized Mr. Vest by the hand, with many expressions of joy. His wife, also, in a moment, left all her domestic cares, to share with her husband in the happiness of seeing and welcoming the "lost child," in whose behalf they had recently felt so much interest. In the gladness of his heart, Mr. S. exclaimed, "the parents must know it," and calling in a neighbor, suddenly despatched him, as the bearer to them of the cheering intelligence, at the same time charging him to keep it all to himself, by the way. But it was too good intelligence to keep. He must share it with

some others, in confidence, and they had their special friends and confidants, also, to whom they must whisper the strange news; and very soon it was noised all abroad, that Mr. Wilson's lost son had come, and was at Mr. Smith's.

When the messenger arrived at Mr. Wilson's, he found only Mrs. W. at home. To her he delivered his message with an air of composedness. But the sound of son was like an arrow to her soul. She fainted. When she revived, she proposed meeting Mr. V. at Mr. G.'s, a friend of her's, as a suitable place, and a kind of half-way house from her own habitation to Mr. Smith's, where Mr. V. had stopped, and was expected to dine. Mrs. Wilson hastily preparing herself, and adjusting affairs at home, started off with the tidings-bearer, to the proposed place of meeting—with what feelings, we may perhaps imagine, but cannot

describe. The expectation had just been excited in her bosom, of soon meeting her only son, of whom she had not heard for many a long year, and whom she had given up as lost irrecoverably to his parents.

Mr. Smith saw her coming, and immediately started off to meet her, not knowing but she intended to come to his own habitation. He however soon returned, saying that "Mrs. W. has thought it best to meet Mr. Vest at Mr. G.'s. We will make preparation to go up very soon. The place is a very proper one, as the house is large, and the rooms are so spacious. There will be many present, as there is such an excitement here on what to-day has transpired."

No one can compass the feelings of Mr. Vest during the interval. Time dragged heavily. Dinner came and passed, almost untouched by him. The filial feelings which had long lain dormant in his bosom, were beginning to be aroused. Between

hope, and fear, and doubts, he could scarcely be composed, or act himself. "Come," said Mr. Smith, "let us be going," and they started, and with hastened step soon reached the place of meeting. They found the room nearly lined around with persons assembled, anxious to witness the interview, with every thing properly arranged; and Mrs. Wilson, the supposed mother, appropriately seated nearly opposite the door of entering. Mrs. Smith passed in first, then Mr. Vest, followed by Mr. Smith, who at once stepped forward a little, and made a suitable introduction of the parties concerned, naming Mr. Vest as "the lost child," the subject of recent correspondence, and the expected son.

The mother rose from her seat, to take the stranger by the hand, but the excitement was too great. She again fainted. As soon as she recovered from her swoon, and her recollection had returned, she reached forth her hand again, for the hand of her supposed

child. She embraced him, kissed him with all the warmth of a mother's heart, and exclaimed, "O, my son! my son!" and sobbed aloud; all others present wept too, and wept freely. The fountains of sympathy and joy were deeply stirred within them, as they beheld the mother, forgetting in the child of four years the son of thirty-four, and clasping him to her bosom as the dear one of almost helpless infancy, as he was thirty years ago, when she last caressed him. A mother's love,

"—knows no change while life endures."

When this most affecting, melting scene, had passed, and the flood of joyous tears flowed off, all countenances looked bright and cheerful as the sun after a refreshing shower; and then followed from Mrs. W. remarks like these—"can it be! O, my son! What! my eyes see him I have buried a hundred times! 'Tis a dream! and yet I

should have known him in the crowd of a thousand." Several observations were also made by others; some in regard to the strong resemblance between mother and son.

About this time, Mr. Wilson returning to his house, and finding that his wife had left, and had been seen going to Mr. G.'s, directed *his* course there also, not knowing fully what had happened. He entered the room, amidst the company, and feeling the infirmities of age, seated himself in a chair, that was unoccupied. Mr. Smith now unexpectedly to Mr. W., introduced Mr. Vest as the lost boy of whom he had heard, and who, he supposed, was his son. The man of years sat in silence a few moments, looked up, and fixed his eyes upon the young man, dropped his head and wept aloud, and began to confess, apparently with deep sorrow and penitence, his want of paternal affection, and of a father's care and kindness towards the son, when a child in infancy.

It seemed as though his heart would break at the recollection of scenes that occurred more than thirty years ago. Here the son kindly interrupting him, said, "why dwell painfully upon the past? It is all forgiven, according to the teachings of my Divine Master, whose spirit I hope that I in some measure possess."

"To err, is human ; to forgive, divine."

That sad and yet profitable season of heart-felt confession on the part of the father, and of forgiveness on the part of the son, was followed by sweet peace and affection in each of their bosoms, and by words of playfulness and pleasantry from the company, in relation to the family resemblances. "He has his father's eye," said one. "Their foreheads are alike," said another. "He has his mother's nose," said a third. "Her chin, too," said another. "Don't you see the father in his cheek?" exclaimed another.

It was now between two and three o'clock, and the company becoming weary of standing, some sat down, and others left, while Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Vest retired, for a special and private interview, to another room, with which at her request, they had been kindly favored. In the meanwhile, the father filled with joy, hastened among his neighbors to share with them the overflowing happiness which he was now experiencing. The mother was anxious to hear a recital of her son's life from his own lips—those lips that she had supposed had long been sealed in death. She desired to hear a thousand things at once, and still could hear but one at a time. That interview was to them very precious, and one during which, each was confirmed in the belief, that they sustained to each other the relation of mother and son. On joining their friends again, they were met with expressions of

gratitude to God, so congenial to pious hearts, for what he had wrought in behalf of the child of many sorrows, and in behalf of the parents, in permitting them once more to set their eyes on a son long lost, but now found.

Mr Vest, wearied out in a great measure with what had transpired, sought retirement. But there was no retirement for him that day. Where he sought it, several came to see the "lost boy," to each of whom he was introduced. And such was the anxiety to hear the adventures of his childhood and youth, that the "Narrative" was again sought and read by a gentleman present, while all sat and listened as if they had never heard a sentence of it before, though the "Narrative" of "the cast-off, or stolen boy," was familiar to many of the citizens of Ontario, and had excited considerable interest in the place; but a sight of the person it identified, gave a new zest to the facts

therein stated. As the reading went on, one exclaimed, "This beats all I ever heard!" Said another, "Well, P., did you ever hear such a marvellous account before? Observed another, "I have heard the old folks tell about their son, that was lost, but I never believed I should see him." "He looks like his father." "No," exclaimed another, "not so much as he looks like his mother." "Come in here, John, Mr. Wilson's son has come," while it was remarked in a low tone, "Strange things have happened here to-day!"

After a short season had been thus spent, Mr. Vest, with some two or three others, started off to see the homestead, to look at the buildings and land of Mr. Wilson. Having spent an hour or so of recreation in this way, they returned to Mr. G.'s, where tea was furnished by the kindness of the good lady of the house, accompanied and followed by a pleasing and refreshing interview.

Many were the interchanges of kind, social, and generous feeling. After the evening's repast, Mr. Wilson, wife and son, went home to spend the night, to retire from the bustle, the heart-affecting, and yet soul-cheering scenes of the day, to enjoy the calm and tranquilizing influence of the private intercourse of kindred spirits, for the first time during many years. But they could not yet be alone, though the evening was somewhat advanced. They had scarcely reached their dwelling, when one—and others called to make inquiries and to congratulate them upon the events of the past day, and to rejoice with them in their new sources of happiness.

When they were left alone, it was late at night, and weariness, from effort and excitement, began imperiously to demand repose. The mother took the family bible, and read a portion of its precious contents. The son then poured out his soul in prayer to God,

thanking Him for strange, preserving mercies. The father sobbed aloud, the mother wept, and, unwilling to repress her feelings, as the son closed his entreaties, she followed in humble prayer of thanks and supplications to their kind Benefactor. They now retired, having committed themselves to a Providence "strangely kind," and still looking to him for protection and blessings. The son was soon lost in refreshing sleep, and the father might be resting quietly, but the mother could not sleep, her joys were so great. She rose, lit the lamp, and with all the anxiety of a mother watching the repose of an infant in the cradle, carefully approached the bedside, gazed upon his countenance, and wept in silence lest she should awake him from his slumbers. At break of day she was again by his side to look upon the slumbering features of her darling son, and when he awoke, to bless him with a mother's tears, smiles and kisses.

“ What is a mother’s love ?  
A noble, pure, and tender flame,  
Enkindled from above.”

Such is the account of a few hours only, in the history of Mr. Vest. Though his life for years had been spent in ignorance of parents and kindred, and, as the consequence had been much embittered—now came a season of compensation, in a small degree, for the past—full of gushing sweetness, and of rare interest—such indeed as none can have, without his experience and deprivations. Thus, our kind Heavenly Father, who gives us not all darkness, makes the sun shine more pleasantly after the storm, brings out to us joy and profit from sorrow and misfortune.

“ Life hath its trials and its gladsome hours.”

It is not in the power of language to express the emotions of joy that pervaded a father’s heart, and swelled a mother’s bosom,

and filled the son's soul, as they mingled in social intercourse; and, after the lapse of thirty years, used again towards each other the endearing words of *father*, *mother*, and *son*,—surrounded the altar of prayer, and implored the blessings of heaven upon the household. Especially was the strength of a mother's love strikingly exhibited, and an interesting portion of Divine truth beautifully and forcibly illustrated, in the constant gazing of that mother upon her son, and in the frequent smoothing of his locks, as she was wont to do in the days of his infancy. She could not forget

“To gaze upon that dearest sight,  
To guard his slumbers with delight,  
Such is a mother's love.”

The small, quiet village of Ontario, never probably saw a period of rarer interest, and of happier influences, than the brief hours whose occurrences have just been described,

and with great particularity indeed. But how seldom has it been the lot of man to witness such interviews and events—events and interviews so well calculated to fill our hearts with gratitude for social natures, and to rouse up the best feelings of the soul ! Well, then, may we pause for a moment, and look minutely on a scene like this, that reminds us so forcibly of the father's reception of the prodigal son—even of the joy in heaven over a penitent sinner, as poetically expressed :

“ Through all the courts the tidings flew,  
And spread the joy around ;  
The angels tuned their harps anew,  
The long lost son is found ! ”

## CHAPTER IX.

LETTER—FESTIVALS—SABBATH MEETINGS—ADIEUS—  
DEPARTURE.

“ Ah, does not every raptured thought,  
Now burn with brighter beam,  
At this fond meeting after years  
Of separation’s dream !  
And does not every pulse respond  
To what the heart would say ?  
Yet cannot vent the gush of thought,  
That drives each word away !”

This description of the poet was more than realized in the meeting of parents and child, as is farther evinced by the following letter from Mr. Smith to Mrs. Vest, dated

*Post Office, Ontario, N. Y.*

*May 21, 1847.*

MADAM,

Your husband, Mr. Abraham Vest, requests me to inform you that he arrived at

my house this day at half past eleven o'clock, A. M. in good health and spirits. He has had an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, and all parties are satisfied that they are his parents.

To see parents and children meet, after thirty years' absence, is affecting under any circumstances. But in the case of your husband and his long lost parents, the meeting was too affecting for words to express a proper idea of the scene. Accept of my respects for yourself and friends, who have been instrumental in bringing this mysterious matter to so successful an end.

Your obedient servant,

CHAS. P. SMITH, P. M.

While Mr. Vest remained in Ontario, every effort was made by his parents and others to render his stay there pleasant and profitable. At one time, he, with his father and some others of his new acquaintances,



was seen taking a delightful excursion on the lake; at other times surveying field and forest scenery; or holding cheerful intercourse at the dwelling of friends; and sometimes attending festivals gotten up especially on his account. At these gatherings, respectable numbers were drawn together, from feelings of curiosity and social cheer; and things suitable to such festive occasions were furnished in abundance, and partaken of, intermingled with profitable remarks.

During one such an assemblage, enjoyed the day following the first interview, and while they were regaling themselves around the table, spread in front of the happy home, a motion was made, seconded, put, and unanimously passed, *that their new acquaintance should no longer be called Abraham Vest, but should henceforth be known among them by the name of John N. Wilson*—the name of the lost child, as early recorded in the family bible.

In all these interviews and festivals, much of a religious character mingled. Expressions of thankfulness to God were often heard, and devotional exercises enjoyed. This feature connected with the lost child's first visit to his parents is worthy of notice, and must be peculiarly gratifying to the pious mind.

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

The most precious hours which Mr. John N. Wilson spent in Ontario were enjoyed with his parents at home. It was all affection there. The father would say with much delight, ‘John has come! ’Tis like a dream! John has indeed come.’ And the mother would tell how often she had sought in public places and thoroughfares her son, as did Joseph and Mary the babe of Bethlehem; that she had not seen a boat for years but she had looked anxiously among the crowd—had gazed thus an hun-

dred times, to see if she could not spy out her darling child. Yes, it was the language of her heart,

“ Come back to me my child, oft I look for thee,  
All the day long I listen for thy voice,  
The ringing laugh that made my heart rejoice,  
Thy blue eyes of love and light I long to see.”

By day and by night, Mrs. Wilson desired to have her eyes constantly upon her son, and to give him frequent tokens of affection. All the while she seemed to view him as he was thirty years ago, needing the constant care of a mother's watchful eye and ministering hand. Every incident, all that had taken place during the long separation, was eagerly sought and listened to with great pleasure. But we must not penetrate too far into the sacred enclosure of home. “ Home, sweet home !” *There* the long lost child is seen again, held in the fond embrace. God witnessed the scene,

and smiled upon it, as in the morning and evening devotions incense from grateful hearts was borne up to the good Shepherd, who “tempers the rough wind to the shorn lamb.”

The Sabbath that the subject of this history spent in Ontario, was to him and others one of peculiar interest. He attended meeting where his parents worshipped, at some distance from their home, and with a denomination of the same sentiment which he and they entertained. As he called at the house of the pastor, in the morning, on his way to meeting, and was introduced to him as the “lost boy,” the reverend gentleman, with much surprise mingled with joy, exclaimed, “is it possible that this is the person set forth in the ‘Narrative?’” at the same time grasping his hand and shaking it heartily. “Little did I think,” he continued, “that I should ever see that child.” They entered the house of God and wor-

shipped in company. The season was soon profitably passed. The pastor, just before he pronounced the benediction, introduced to the congregation, publicly and formally, Mr. Wilson the younger, as the "cast-off or stolen boy;" in consequence of which a very deep interest was awakened in his behalf through that respectable body of worshippers, and was manifested, in various ways at the close of the public services.

In the afternoon, the clergyman took his text in the Song of Solomon 2:4. "*He brought me to the banqueting house and his banner over me was love.*" In his sermon he made several happy allusions to the eventful scene of the parents meeting their long lost child, the joy expressed, the tokens of friendship at the feast they had enjoyed the day previous—"fruit sweet,"—"banner over" them "love." At the close of the sermon, the lost child was unexpectedly to himself, called upon to offer

the concluding prayer. Thus ended the solemn services of that day—

“ The day divinely given  
When men to God their homage pay,  
And earth draws near to heaven.”

These hours of affection and of strange interest fled but too rapidly. It was the last festival meeting. Time passed unobserved. The moment of parting came. The Bible was introduced, and an appropriate portion of it read, and then Mr. John N. Wilson, by request, offered prayer. A deep sense of the divine presence pervaded the assembly—such as is seldom felt. It was probably the last prayer they would ever all engage in together. But if it should be answered, they will all mingle their praises to God in company around the throne above.

“ Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,  
The Christian’s native air,  
His watchword at the gates of death,  
He enters heaven with prayer.”

The parting scene between parents and child, a few hours afterwards, also came. At the table they implored the divine blessing, as they had been wont, but could not partake of the bounties upon it. The parents' tears would steal silently down their careworn cheeks, and the son felt oppressed. Soon the final period was reached. The parting hand was given to all present, accompanied with pious wishes and expressions of thankfulness for special favors and kindness received. Some retired, unable to endure the scene. It was deeply affecting. The parents were bidding adieu to their only son,\* who for years had been lost, and whom, but just now, they had looked upon again for a brief moment. This may be the final adieu. The scene cannot be described. It was not precisely like other parting scenes of the kind. The difference

---

\* They have had several children since they went to Ontario, but these all died in infancy.

may perhaps be imagined by those whose solicitude to keep a precious treasure safely has been increased by its escape for a season from their knowledge and anxious search.

“ But who can e'er describe the tears  
We shed when thus we sever,  
If doomed to part, for months, for years ;  
*To part, perhaps forever?*  
Then let us form those bonds above  
Which time can ne'er dissever,  
Since, parting in a Saviour's love,  
*We part, to meet forever.”*

## CHAPTER X.

RETURN—INCIDENT—ARRIVAL HOME—MOTHER'S LETTER.

“ So changeful is life's fleeting day,  
Whene'er we sever, Hope may say,  
*We part, to meet again.*”

Mr. Wilson was now taken by Mr. Smith to New London, fourteen miles. Thence he went to Camden, to visit a brother of his wife. After spending a short season there very pleasantly, he returned to New London, and took the cars for Utica and Albany. He is now rapidly hastening towards the home of his wife and children, with a new name, and a lock of hair—the name and lock of his infancy—with a knowledge of his age gained from the sure family record—with the images of his parents impressed on his soul—with many little presents for his family, as tokens of affection packed up by

a mother's hand, and with a letter full of affection for his companion at his far-off dwelling place. Thus he returned with meditations and feelings far different from those in which he indulged while going to Ontario; having treasured up a volume of incidents, impressions and recollections, to afford solace and pleasure in future years.

On his way home, he tarried a night at Albany, and while passing along the street in the evening, without a single acquaintance in the city, his ear caught the voice of prayer. He listened. It came from a vestry near. Thither he bent his steps, in solemn, joyous haste. He was soon among the worshippers—was gratified with the devotional services, and constrained to add his testimony to the value of an interest in Christ. And the following extract will show, that nothing is lost by seeking the house of prayer, and in bearing witness to the truth, even among strangers. It is taken

from the Evening Journal, a paper published in Albany, N. Y., and headed,

“AN INCIDENT.”

“Those persons who were present at the prayer meeting at Dr. Welch’s Church, on Friday evening last, will recollect, that towards the close of the meeting, a young man, apparently a stranger, entered, and took a seat with the assembly. Opportunity being given for exhortation from any, the stranger arose and remarked, that while he was waiting for the cars to leave for Massachusetts, he happened to be strolling by the door, and hearing the voice of prayer, had entered; and although a stranger, he already felt that he was among Christian brethren, who used the same language and followed the same Master. *The writer* of this, impelled by the Yankee propensity, and being himself a native of Massachusetts, at the close of the meeting sought an interview

with the stranger, and learned from him the following particulars.

“Some months ago, it will perhaps be recollect that a long account was published in many of the papers, (and in the *Evening Journal* among the rest, I believe,) of a young man who was living in the vicinity of Worcester, Mass., who was either lost or stolen from his parents nearly thirty years ago,—whose only recollection of the matter was, that he was taken from a large and thickly settled place, (Albany, as he has always supposed,) and carried he knew not whither—that after strolling through the country some years with a company of vagrant Indians, with whom he suffered almost incredible hardships—having on one occasion narrowly escaped being murdered by one of their number—he finally escaped from them at Providence, R. I., and after living in one place and another, located in New England Village, in Grafton, Mass.,

where he was married, about ten years ago, and has since resided.

“The account was prepared by a Baptist minister, and originally appeared in the Boston Christian Watchman, from which it was extensively copied into the papers through the country. There has been much sympathy felt for the individual, as he neither knew where he was born, or whether any of his kindred were in the land of the living, and was, moreover, entirely *ignorant of his own name and age*. He has, however, for many years, called himself and been known by the name of Abraham Vest.

“It seems that the above account fell into the hands of an aged couple in the town of Ontario, Wayne Co., N. Y., who felt a peculiar interest in this case; and the post-masters of Ontario and New England Village, opened a correspondence on the subject. The result of it is, that Mr. Vest had just been out to see his supposed parents; and

was on his return to Massachusetts when the writer saw him as above narrated.

*“His journey was successful!* The moment the mother saw her long lost son, she fainted. But the more cautious son, anxious to ascertain to a certainty whether these were indeed his parents, required unmistakeable proofs.

“The mother, with a mother’s memory, described the mark upon his back, and the scar upon his foot. He could no longer doubt, and the scene that followed may be better imagined than described. The parents rejoiced over the ‘son that was found.’ The son, who supposed himself an orphan, rejoiced to find his parents—even in their old age. He also ascertained that his real name is John N. Wilson, and his age, about thirty-four years.

“At the time of the separation, the father was somewhat dissipated, and this probably was one cause of the calamity. The

writer saw and read a letter from the mother, which the son was carrying to his wife—the new daughter-in-law. It was a most touching and affectionate epistle, from one, who, after the frosts of nearly sixty winters had passed over her, had again found new objects of affection.

“It may, perhaps, be proper to state, that it is the intention of Mr. Vest, alias Mr. Wilson, to publish, hereafter, an account of his somewhat eventful, and romantic history.

“*Albany, June 3, 1847.*      T. W. V.”

The writer of the above extract, not forgetful of the Apostolic injunction, Heb. 11:2,—entertained the stranger during his short sojourn in the city, and at his departure, cheered him on his way. Hospitality is a *Christian* duty, and every one who bears the name of Christ, should remember and *practice* it. The Saviour marks the person who gives a cup of cold water to a disciple.

from love to the Master, and will not allow him to lose his reward.

“ Blest are the men whose mercies move  
To acts of kindness and of love ;  
From Christ the Lord shall they obtain  
Like sympathy, and love again.”

Mr. John N. Wilson, having been absent about two weeks, arrived home in safety, and found his family in usual health and spirits, waiting to receive him. Indeed, they were overjoyed at his return and his success in finding his parents—were delighted with the various presents marked and sent to them, and also much cheered with the verbal and written communications.

The following “ touching and affectionate epistle,” from Mrs. Wilson to Mrs. Vest, the wife of her son, referred to, in the above communication found in the Albany Evening Journal, is here inserted, and will be

read with interest. It was written for her son to take with him home.

*Ontario, May 23, 1847.*

Since I call your husband my son, may I take the liberty to call you my daughter? If so, I would say to you, dear daughter, that God in mercy has smiled upon me in restoring my son, that was once lost, but now is found. And what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? My pen cannot paint the blessed interview that I have had with him. I feel that heaven and earth are full, and my bosom is full too. My trembling frame could hardly bear the interview with my darling son, and how can I endure the separation? That God whom I love alone can bear me up. I trust that I shall have your prayers, and the prayers of my darling. May the blessing of God rest upon you both in all your undertakings. Sally, I know

that I love you for my son's sake, and your children also. Give my best respects to my beloved grand children. I long to fold them in my arms. My heart has been made to leap for joy. But now my bosom swells with grief at the thought of his departure. Dear child, consider the age of your mother, fifty-five years old, and the many afflictions that she has passed through, and then you will be prepared for making allowance for the broken manner in which these lines come to you.

Give my love to your dear mother. May the Lord bless her for giving her child to my lost son, and adding so much to his happiness, when he had none to protect him but the God he loves. If John should tell you of my childish acts, your good sense will forbid you to say that mother was a *simpleton*. No doubt you could say she acted foolishly, for I could hardly refrain

from holding him in my arms as I did when he was a little child.

So no more at present, only I remain  
Your affectionate mother till death,

LYDIA WILSON.

What a striking exemplification of the special providence of God is presented in the facts recorded in the preceding pages!—In taking a glance at the life of this friendless, cast-off child, from his earliest years till he arrives at the maturity of manhood, you at once discover a delivering and protecting arm stretched out in his behalf—not only in his near escapes from death, but in his preservation from social and moral influences, the only tendency of which is to corrupt and destroy. At one time, he is scarcely saved from a watery grave; at another, the fatal blow of the cruel savage is stayed by an unseen hand; and then again, he is mysteriously preserved from

perishing from cold and hunger. He is in the midst of intemperance, but he is kept from touching the intoxicating cup;—He is in the very dwelling of her whose “steps take hold of death,” but he is saved from her fatal grasp;—He is associated with the vile, the vicious and profane, but he is preserved from their baneful influence. In all these perils and exposures, God was not an unconcerned spectator; and though he permitted him to pass through such sufferings and corrupting scenes, it was only that Divine mercy, in his deliverance and preservation, might appear more conspicuous to him in after life—awaken in his mind a deeper sense of his entire dependence on Him, and of leading him to fly to Jesus as his only refuge, his God, his all.

## CHAPTER XI.

## SOME FARTHER ACCOUNT OF THE PARENTS—PAINFUL DISCLOSURES.

“ Sweet visions those, that cheer our way,  
And lead our weary spirits on ;  
As sunbeams on a winter’s day,  
So bright, so beautiful are they,  
But oh ! so quickly gone.”

Some forty years ago, Mrs. Wilson, then a girl about fifteen years of age, spent a season in Boylston, Mass., as a scholar under the instructions of the Rev. Mr. Cotton, at that time minister of the town. Those happy days were passed amidst the very scenes where her long lost son John N. Wilson, years afterwards, commenced house-keeping—an interesting circumstance, to which allusion has already been made. Those hours, yea the period of youth, of hope and promise, fled swiftly. At length,

about 1810, Miss Lydia Negus, "whilst keeping school in Manchester, Vt., became acquainted with Mr. William Wilson, whom she soon afterwards married."

At that time, intemperance was rife and increasing. The nation was rapidly becoming a nation of drunkards. Nothing comparatively had been done to arrest the wide-spreading flood of desolation. A demon from the nether world, like the destroying angel passing through Egypt, was slaying the first-born of the land—men of rare intellect—first in attainments and promise, and causing weeping and lamentation in almost every dwelling. Thousands of delicate and confiding females had their fairest prospects blasted, and their hopes crushed, by its prostrating, ruinous influence upon the objects around which their affections had entwined themselves. Heaven only knows how many and how awful have been the scenes produced by the poisoned

bowl—scenes which must be endured to a considerable extent in solitude and silence—the sufferers being cut off in a great measure from the sympathies and consolations that come to hearts rent and wretched by afflictive providences.

The new home of the youthful and confiding Lydia, furnished such scenes. The spoiler of domestic peace found its way there; commenced the work of cruelty and wretchedness, and eventually impelled the husband to join the army. Mr. Wilson enlisted during the last war between the United States and England, and was an officer under Capt. P., and in the division commanded by Gen. Dearborn.

Soon after he had left home as a soldier, he was informed of the birth of his second child, the subject of this history, who was named John Negus Wilson, in part after his mother's maiden name, and in part after an uncle John, who died about this time.

How much was the kindness and assistance of the husband and father then needed by that mother, and her innocent, helpless daughter and son. But he is engaged in other business, and affords no aid, or joy at home. After the war had closed, Mr. W. returned to his family at Dummerston, Vt., probably not much benefited by past companionship and employment.

What must be the effect, upon the soldier, of preparing himself to take human life! Is it right to do it? Has war Heaven's approval? "*He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword.*"

"It was but yesterday that two nations met  
In battle dire, and each with God's great name  
Upon its lips, went murdering all the day ;  
At eve, the victor, full knee deep in blood,  
Cried ' Glory ! glory !' to the frightened wind,  
And all the people with an idiot smile  
On their puffed cheeks, cried glory to the stars  
That shuddered at the sound."

How wide the contrast between such shouts of victory, and the angels' song over Bethlehem's babe, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE, good will towards men!*!" And how immensely unlike the spirit of war is the spirit of Him, who on the cross prayed for his murderers —*still let them live!* If a foe must be killed, a 'fine and noble way' to do it, is 'not to kill him,' but 'with kindness' to

"So change him that he will cease to be so;  
And then he's slain."

Mr. Wilson, soon after his return, went with his family to live in Boulton, Warren co., N. Y. He had now ceased to be a soldier in the national army; but he still TRAINED, to the great injury of the peace and happiness of himself and household. Indeed, during one of these *training* times, when in a high state of feverish excitement, produced probably by strong drink, he se-

verely whipped Abraham, to make him disclose the author of some trivial offence, and, not succeeding in his purpose, in a fit of phrenzy which came suddenly upon him, he siezed the child, carried him to a spring of water near at hand, and thrust him beneath its surface, and held him there until life became so far extinct that it required the anxious and unceasing efforts of friends all night to restore the little sufferer. Oh, spirit of 'raging!' 'Thou monster of cruelty and wickedness, that destroyest the reason, and convertest human beings into fiends!

Scenes of cruelty and peril like this were not always to be endured. Consequently, Mrs. Wilson, with the advice and assistance of friends, and "unknown to her husband," went to Troy, N. Y., to visit a sister of hers, who was married and residing in that place, taking her children with her. The morning before she started, the Rev. A. G.,

the Presbyterian minister of the town, put into her hand, unsolicited, a paper, signed by himself and several respectable citizens of the place. From this paper the following extract is inserted, as due to Mrs. W., showing the character she sustained at this most sad and disastrous period in the history of that family.

“This certifies that Mrs. Lydia Wilson has lived in this place about a year, and as far as is known, has fulfilled all relative duties to her husband, children and neighbors, and nothing appears to destroy charity for her as a Christian.”

It is evident also, from this certificate, that Mrs. W. left her husband “agreeable to the advice of all her neighbors.” And yet how lamentable is such a separation of parents! Mrs. Wilson, after spending several months in Troy, returned to Dummerston, Vt., taking her daughter with her, and leaving her son in the care of her sister in Troy.

John at this time was about four years of age.

Mr. Wilson, after his wife and children had left him, went to Ontario, Wayne Co., N. Y., taking with him what little effects he then had. About a year afterwards, he returned to Warren Co., N. Y., to the town of Johnsbury. Here Mrs. W. commenced again living with him, through the solicitations of some of his friends, soon after which they removed to Ontario, the place of their present residence. The daughter was allowed to remain in the care of friends in Vermont, and the son at this time was "understood to be living with a family of Dutch people who resided in Troy, and who had no children of their own, where he was well cared for." This apparently favorable arrangement for his welfare was specially pleasing to the mother, who, fearing a repetition of past scenes, felt unwilling

that Mr. Wilson should ever again have any control of the children.

They were now in a new country, destitute in a great measure of this world's goods, pressed with cares and anxieties, having no mails, or means of public conveyance like those now enjoyed, and at a long distance from Troy. Under such circumstances it would not be very surprising if the mother should obtain but little or no intelligence from her son—that child of whom, on several accounts, she felt indisposed to remind the father.

## CHAPTER XII.

MYSTERY EXPLAINED—HAPPY CHANGE—MOTHER'S LETTER—CONCLUSION.

“Where is the troubled heart, consigned to share  
Tumultuous toils, or solitary care,  
Unblest by visionary thoughts that stay,  
To count the joys of Fortune's better day?”

Time rolled off rapidly, and when no tidings came from John, the mother contented herself as well as she could, in supposing that he was “well off,” as she had every reason to believe, and that she should soon hear from him again, or welcome him some time to her fond embrace. Years, however, swiftly passed, and no tidings from Troy as yet reached her humble home; until at length she entirely lost sight of her sister and son;—and respecting the existence or residence of that sister, she has now no information. Could she be found, more might

be learned of the history of the subject of this narrative while in Troy, and also relative to the Dutch family in which he was left in his early childhood, and perhaps more information might be gained in regard to his leaving that family, and respecting the time, occasion and way of his departure, from Troy, and the cause of his subsequent wanderings and sufferings. As it is, Abraham's recollection of seeing two women talking together on the sidewalk in some "thickly inhabited place," and of his being persuaded by the promise of a pleasant ride, and of sweetmeats, cake and sights, to get into some carriage, and ride with one of them, affords the probability, that he was, from some cause, wickedly and cruelly "cast off" by the Dutch family, or some other family, where it must have been expected that he would be favored with kind care, and a good home. Whoever perpetrated

the grievous wrong upon the innocent child, must answer it at the court of heaven.

“ Tender and kind be all our thoughts,  
Through all our lives let mercy run.”

Since the day when Mr. Wilson trained as a warrior, a great reform in the cause of temperance has come over the nation, scattering its blessings on every side. It reached Ontario, and the veteran soldier yielded to its influence, and his home became peaceable, pleasant, and comfortable.

Says the post-master of that place in his communications, “ William and Lydia Wilson have been residents of this town some twenty-eight or twenty-nine years. They have always been called honest. Mr. W., some years ago, often drank to ‘excess;’ and when under the influence of strong drink, he was very quarrelsome. He is, however, quite a different man from what

he must have been at the time he lived in Vermont. He has for several years been a quiet and peaceable citizen, and they have lived together quite happily. About five years since," the post-master adds, "I obtained his name to the pledge of total abstinence, which he has faithfully kept." He is indeed a reformed man. *Reformed!* There is something in this expression, that has made chords in human bosoms vibrate in harmony with the music of heaven. We honor such men, and rejoice that they are becoming numerous; that an army of them has already risen up to bless society, to maintain "the right," and to battle manfully the hydra-headed enemy, so difficult to destroy, but whose destruction must come, and then shall be heard the shout of triumph, long and loud, as the monster is cast back again into the bottomless pit, to deceive the nations no more forever.

It must, indeed, have afforded joy to the readers of this history, to have just learned, that from another dwelling—from the early home of the “cast-off boy,” the bitter enemy to domestic peace and happiness has been thrust out, and temperance with its thousand smiles and blessings has taken its place. Now the affections of a mother’s heart can flow forth unrestrained towards loved objects, while the father’s mingle in unison, as is clearly evidenced by the following letter from Mrs. Wilson to her son, dated

*Ontario, June 11, 1847.*

*Absent, though affectionate Son and Daughter,—*After my greatest love to you and yours, I would inform you that my health is as good as it was when you left here, and I hope this will find you well. I received your letter June 10th, and it was a happy prize to me. I was glad to hear that

you arrived safe at home, and found family and friends all well. I feel to praise God that my dear son lives, and that I can correspond with him by letter, if I am deprived of seeing him; although it seems as if my heart would run out, when I think of him and his sufferings. But I feel to put my trust in God, and believe that all things work together for good to them that love Him.

“Your father is well, and often speaks of you, and says that he never saw any one that he loved so well. Friends all send their love to you. Will you write me again as soon as you can; for my anxiety is so great for you; and write whether you think that you shall come here to live or not. For I am making preparation for you and your family, as well as for myself. Our crops look very promising. Give my love to your wife, and your wife’s mother, and your children. Kiss your children for me.

This from your unworthy mother, till death. God bless you and yours.

LYDIA WILSON.

In taking leave of the Wilson family, we catch the mother's pious wish, that reminds us of our dependence on God; and we will cast the like of it afloat again, in hope that it may be wafted to heaven. May the Lord indeed bless the child of so many hardships, and his family: make him in every commendable respect like that beloved disciple who stood by the cross, and received the Saviour's confiding, parting request, in the affectionate utterance, "behold thy mother." The Lord bless also the parents in their loneliness, beside the graves of all their children born to them in Ontario. Give them the joys of his presence, fruitful fields, a cloudless setting sun, and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. And may the good hand of the Lord be

upon us all, filling our hearts with gladness and kindness, directing our steps, making us useful on earth, and preparing us for heaven :

In that pure home of tearless joy,  
Earth's parted friends shall meet,  
With smiles of love that never fade,  
And blessedness complete ;  
There, there adieus are sounds unknown ;  
Death frowns not on that scene,  
But life and glorious beauty shine  
Untroubled and serene."















